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THE STATE OF BLACK OMAHA

1980

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D E D I C A T I O N

This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., who said of the relationship of white men and black men:

"The black man needs the white man to free him from his fear, and the white man needs the black man to free him from his guilt."

INTRODUCTION

In early 1978, the Urban League of Nebraska published a report designed to measure the status of Blacks in housing, employment, education, health care and political participation. At that time, Blacks in Omaha were found to be deficient in all the above areas in relation to the general community.

Today, in early 1980, the basic facts of that report have not significantly changed. Blacks are still almost exclusively concentrated east of 48th Street with most of them having a median income just under half that of the Omaha average of \$16,000.¹ Official figures indicate that while Black unemployment has dropped in Omaha since 1978, the ratio of Black to White unemployment has been steadily increasing since 1975.

The situation in education has been worsening for minorities in Omaha since 1978. White enrollment decline has been sharp; Black students are still being suspended at a higher rate than their numbers justify; in addition, certain elements within the general Omaha community appear to be fighting the spirit of the desegregation order of the courts by attempting to undercut the ability of the Omaha Public School System to function effectively.

In health, a severe professional manpower shortage continues to exist on the Near Northside while existing health care facilities available to Blacks are only minimally adequate.

In the area of political participation, there has been an increase in Black voter registration and voter turnout since early 1978, yet Blacks still have no direct representation in City or County government.

However, since 1978, certain segments of the Omaha establishment have recognized the need for a concerted effort to help the Near Northside become a more equal partner within the overall Omaha community.

The Urban League of Nebraska, in this report, will attempt not only to provide a factual assessment of conditions for Blacks in Omaha, but will also comment on the major issues that confronted Omaha in 1979 and what impact these and other issues may have on the future growth of both the minority and majority communities in the early 1980's.

COMMENTARY

"OMAHA IN 1979: A STEP FORWARD OR BACKWARD?"

A Minority Viewpoint

The Year of 1979, for Blacks in Omaha, from the perspective of the Urban League of Nebraska, was one of "mixed blessings", --- a year of surface accomplishments muddled by an underlying fear that actions to improve conditions for minorities were undertaken with reluctance if not outright resentment.

Nineteen-Hundred Seventy Nine in Omaha marked the passage of a formal Affirmative Action Ordinance as well as a Contract Compliance Ordinance -- both of which had been recommended since at least 1975. (In addition, a plan calling for a specified number of housing units for low and moderate income citizens to be built west of 42nd Street was approved.)

Specifically, the Affirmative Action Ordinance appears to be a general statement of intent to provide equal opportunity for minorities, not an attempt to remedy the effects of past discrimination by establishing concrete hiring goals for specific job categories over a given period of time.

Our fears that the Affirmative Action Ordinance was to be little more than an attempt to meet a Federal requirement were enhanced by the transfer of the responsibility for monitoring of the plan from the Human Relations Department to the Personnel Department -- which struck many as an effort to minimize the influence of the one City Department with some real expertise in affirmative action as well as a way of possibly avoiding too close an examination of actual hiring practices.

The minority community also doubted the sincerity of the City in passing the first comprehensive Contract Compliance Ordinance in Omaha's history. The idea behind the passage of the ordinance was not to admit that many of Omaha's business and labor organizations had discriminated in the hiring of minority applicants in the past, but to give minority contractors a chance to begin to enter the competitive bidding process for City contracts.

The third major action undertaken by the City of Omaha to enhance social and economic conditions for minorities was the approval of "scattered site" low and moderate income housing in late September. Approval of the construction of these housing units, in addition to the passage of the two ordinances previously mentioned, was required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development before any of the

\$5.6 million dollars of Community Development Block Grant money for 1979 would be released to the City of Omaha.

If public opinion on "scattered site housing" had been allowed to prevail on this matter, it is doubtful that any units of low-income housing would have been approved for construction west of 42nd Street. To a great many people within the minority community, the bitter debate that characterized this issue during the summer of 1979 seemed to indicate that many elements within the Omaha community felt that no effort should be made to integrate the city, either on a racial or on an economic basis. To these same people, Federal aid of any kind with any strings attached should apparently be rejected outright and should be viewed as attempts to "meddle" with the people's basic right to govern themselves.

This feeling extended to the State level as well. The passage of LB 329 in May of 1979 mandated that Omaha City Councilmen be elected by district, an idea that has been turned down by Omaha voters every time it has been submitted as a referendum in general elections.

Another reaction, perhaps, to the perceived attempt of elected representatives to deny the people's right to self-government was the decision, on August 14, 1979, of those citizens residing in the Omaha School District to impose a zero percent lid on the current administration.

Since taxing districts in the State were already under a 7% spending limitation regarding property tax portions of their budgets, passage of the school spending lid appeared to be more of an attempt to penalize one school district for its alleged mismanagement of taxpayer funds than

an innocent effort to reduce property taxes.

More important, in the opinion of the Urban League of Nebraska and other community organizations, approval of such a severe budget cutback could be interpreted as an attempt by certain groups within the community to use the notion of "a balanced budget" to impede responsible social change as well as to attempt to bypass the existing structures of representative government in Omaha.

In Omaha, Nebraska in 1979, seemingly every time that efforts were made to improve living conditions or opportunities for minorities to compete, counter-efforts were made to minimize the effects of those gains.

It is against this backdrop that the Urban League of Nebraska will attempt to assess the current status of Blacks and other disadvantaged persons living on Omaha's Near Northside. Hopefully, after reading this section of our report, Omaha citizens will be able to judge for themselves what the effects of less than equal opportunity have been for a significant minority of Omaha's overall population.

BLACKS IN OMAHA

As of January 1980, over 95% of all Blacks living in the State of Nebraska resided in Omaha or Douglas County. In Omaha alone, approximately 10% of the City's overall population is Black.²

Thirty years ago Blacks numbered 16,882 or 6.8% of the total Omaha population.³

At that time, according to the Planning Department, Omaha's popu-

lation resided in an area that covered 41 square miles. By 1978, this area had grown to 92 square miles.⁴

In 1950, only four census tracts had populations that were more than 50% Black. Generally, those tracts were between Bristol, Cuming, 30th and 20th Streets. By 1976, 14 tracts, roughly between Fort, Cuming, 16th and 48th Streets, were more than 50% Black.⁵

During the period from 1950 to 1980, Blacks also were moving to the north and northwest. That movement is reflected by figures that indicate that by 1976, 26 census tracts were 10% or more Black compared to only 9 in 1950.⁶ However, neither in 1976 nor today are any of these 26 census tracts with at least 10% Black population located west of 60th street, much less west of 72nd street.

For the last thirty years, there has been a very rapid movement of the overall population from 72nd Street west to the Millard area and beyond -- a movement that Blacks, for one reason or another, have not generally been a part of. In 1950, only 4 out of every 100 Douglas County residents lived west of 72nd Street. In 1960, that figure had increased to 12 out of 100; by 1970, it had escalated to 28 and by 1978 it had risen to 41.⁷

Of the 13% increase in the migration west of the general Omaha population from 1970 to 1978, Black population movement amounted to only 2.5%. (N.B. In 1978, MAPA concluded that: "99% of all Douglas County Blacks lived east of 72nd Street in 1970; 96.5% still do."⁸)

The data presented in the following pages is primarily concerned with the great majority of Blacks seemingly confined to the area east of 48th Street, north of Cuming, west of 16th Street and south of Fort

Street, not those relatively few Blacks living west of 72nd Street.

HOUSING

In 1980, as in 1978, figures indicate that about 95% of Omaha's 38,000 or so Black residents live in a highly concentrated state (16 persons per square mile compared to .60 persons per square mile in the SMSA) within an eight square-mile area of the Northeast sector of the city.⁹

Over the past thirty years, people have been leaving the northeastern part of Omaha at a rapid rate. This movement has been especially acute for those on Omaha's Near Northside. Since 1970, out of 17 tracts which have lost more than 25% of their population, 15 are located east of 42nd Street. (Eleven of these 15 tracts are situated north of Cuming Street.¹⁰)

According to the City of Omaha's 1978 Housing Plan, 10 to 30% of all housing units in most of the eastern third of Omaha are seriously deteriorated. The area east of 42nd Street is cited to be "suffering a general decline and is dotted with pockets of dilapidation and decay."¹¹

Consider also the following 1978 figures provided by the City of Omaha:

- Since 1960, population loss east of 42nd Street has been almost 40,000 and over 500 retail outlets have closed their doors.
- Of the last 60,000 building permits, less than 1,300 were issued for east of 42nd Street.
- In just one year, 1972, twice as many houses were demolished east of 42nd Street as were built there in the four years of 1970-1973.

.... In 1973, there were more than 5,000 abandoned or vacant lots in the area.¹²

Other indicators of the conditions of neighborhoods and urban housing stocks are renter vs owner-occupied housing, vacancy rates, and mean housing values.

For purposes of analysis, we will focus on the Near Northside, an area bounded roughly by Cuming, Fort, 16th and 48th Streets. Included in this area are Census Tracts 6 to 13.02, 14 and 15, 51 to 54, as well as 59.01, 59.02 and 60.

In 1978, 54% of all the housing units located within the study area were renter-occupied compared to a figure of 37% for Omaha as a whole.¹³

The vacancy rates for these tracts in 1978 was 9.4 compared to 5.3 for the general population, or a ratio of almost 2 to 1.¹⁴

Finally, the mean housing value on the Near Northside was \$6,600 compared to the city-wide average of \$32,371, a ratio of nearly 5 to 1.¹⁵

The low housing values quoted and the high vacancy rate that currently exists on Omaha's Near Northside could be indications that people are leaving the area as soon as they can afford to.

Regarding this phenomenon, the City Planning Department stated in 1978 that "the northeast section is being slowly drained of the families most needed to stabilize any recovery efforts and is becoming a concentration of low-income, unemployed, and underemployed families".¹⁶

ECONOMIC STATUS

Most Blacks living in Omaha have a median income just under half that of the Omaha average of \$16,000, a 1978 figure provided by the Omaha City Planning Department.

While the average income for the small number of Black families living in north and northwest Omaha will be moderately higher, the median income for those living on the Near Northside is approximately \$7,000 or 43% of the Omaha figure cited above.¹⁷

In 1970, residents of the heavily Black populated Census Tracts 6 to 13.02, 14-15, 51-54 and 59.01-60 had a median income of \$6,287 or 60% of the Omaha median income of \$10,419.¹⁸

Going back to 1960, Blacks in the target area had a median income of \$6,408.¹⁹

As the data indicates, a significant number of Black Omahans, in 1978, earned only about 10% more than the average Omaha resident earned in 1960. The income gap between Black and Whites, in general, has widened by 34% over the last 18 years, a figure that is especially troubling in light of double-digit inflation and declining economy.

EMPLOYMENT

In employment, as in median income, Blacks have not fared as well as Whites in Omaha for a number of years.

Current figures provided by the Nebraska Department of Labor indicate that Black unemployment for 1979 was 10% compared to 3.6% for Whites, just as it was in 1978.²⁰

Yet in early 1980, Black adults continue to be officially unemployed at a rate two to three times higher than their percentage in the labor force.

To put the matter into even better perspective, the following table compares the official unemployment rates for Blacks and Whites in Omaha from 1975 to 1979:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BLACKS</u>	<u>RATIO</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
1975	19.9%	(2.5 to 1)	7.8%
1976	12.7%	(2.7 to 1)	4.7%
1977	10.8%	(2.8 to 1)	3.9%
1978	10.0%	(2.8 to 1)	3.6%
1979	10.0%	(2.8 to 1)	3.6% ²¹

Examining this table, we find that since 1975, overall official unemployment for both Blacks and Whites has decreased by about 50%. Impressive as this figure seems, the table also reveals that the ratio of Black to White unemployment actually increased from 2.5 in 1975 to 2.8 in 1977. Since that time, Black unemployment has stayed the same in relation to the level for Whites. Unfortunately, the current ratio of 2.8 to 1 is considerably higher than the 1978 national average of 2.3 to 1 --- "the widest it has ever been".²²

Further complicating the attempt to assess the employment situation of Blacks in Omaha is the fact that the above figures are based only on the number of individuals reporting to the Nebraska Job Service. Urban League figures as of December 1978 indicated that 40% of our clients seeking work had not reported to an official agency.²³

Utilizing this figure as a rough "Hidden Unemployment Index", the Urban League calculates that the unofficial employment rate for Black adults in Omaha is closer to 15% than the official 10% rate. In addition,

a Community Needs Assessment Study conducted by the Urban League in the Summer of 1979 found the unemployment rate to be 26% within Omaha's Near Northside.

Turning to youth unemployment, the Douglas County Office of Children and Youth declared last year that "youths remain unemployed at a rate 2 to 3 times higher than that of adults, no matter what the overall rate".²⁴

The latest official estimates for youth unemployment (ages 16 to 24) in Omaha indicate a rate of 19.3% for Blacks compared to 8.3% for Whites.²⁵ Using our 40% Hidden Unemployment Index once again, the Urban League calculates that actual Black youth unemployment figures are closer to 30% than 20%. (However, even this figure may be a conservative estimate of minority youth unemployment in the core of the inner city).

Underlying these raw figures, whether for adults or youths, is the need for more timely data as well as more accurate methods of assessing actual unemployment conditions for both active job-seekers and for discouraged workers.

Equally important is the need to establish meaningful affirmative action and job training programs in the city of Omaha, both in the public and private sectors of the local economy.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

This section of the STATE OF BLACK OMAHA will attempt to assess the factual status of affirmative action in the Omaha SMSA.

To do this, we first need to define what index will be used to estimate labor availability for minorities, regardless of specific job categories. Whatever measure is chosen will determine what the number or percentage goal for minority hiring will be.

The State of Nebraska, in early 1979, indicated that the goal of its new Affirmative Action program would be to create a workforce which is "representative of the State working population".

Statewide, Blacks, by far the largest minority group in Nebraska, make up 2.3% of the workforce, but a full 6% of Omaha's labor force.

The City of Omaha, on the other hand, has chosen to use a more liberal index of population parity as a goal for its minority hiring practices. Thus, for minorities as a whole, 12% is the index currently used while for Blacks (if they were included as a separate category) 10% would be the hiring goal.

Let us examine how the actual minority hiring practices of both the City of Omaha and the private employment sector measure up to either local labor force percentages or to population parity figures.

The following table, should prove instructive:

JOB CATEGORY	MINORITY	
	OMAHA SMSA-(Private)	CITY-(Public)
Officials/Administrators	539 (2.5%)	1 (7.0%)
Professionals	2,001 (5.4%)	29 (8.0%)
Technicians	727 (4.0%)	12 (4.0%)
Protective Service	131 (5.4%)	43 (6.8%)
Para-Professionals	2,001 (5.4%)	10 (23.8%)
Office & Clerical	2,721 (5.4%)	49 (19.4%)
Skilled Craft	1,281 (4.1%)	56 (13.6%)
Service Maintenance	4,159 (13.1%)	162 (33.7%) ₂₇

From the data presented, we can see that Omaha Blacks and other minorities suffer not only high unemployment rates but also high

under-employment rates.

The City of Omaha seems to be doing a comparatively better job of employing minorities than the private sector but needs to reverse a trend of overemployment in lower-paying and less skilled jobs.

Since this data was released, the City has approved an Affirmative Action Ordinance. However, there has been no indication from the City, up to this point, how implementation of the plan has been proceeding nor whether any attempts are being made to reverse the above mentioned trend of minority underemployment.

Omaha's private sector has even farther to go to achieve minority hiring practices in any job category (except service maintenance workers) at a level close to the Black labor force percentage of 6.8%, much less the population parity figures of 10-12%.

EDUCATION

In the area of education, affirmative action once again became a live topic for debate when the Omaha School Board, on November 19, 1979, authorized development of a plan to hire more women and minority group members at all levels of the school system.

Like the Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Ordinances passed by the City of Omaha, the School Board's plan does not include strict hiring quotas, but will attempt to have the ethnic and racial composition of the staff be reflective of either the district's student population or the city as a whole. (According to City Planning Department figures, minorities account for almost 12% of the City's population while

OPS reports that 28.8% of the students enrolled in the Omaha School District are members of minority groups.²⁸⁾

Recent data from the Omaha Public School administration indicates that only 10.3% of the system's teachers are from minority groups, or 9.5% if Blacks alone were counted.²⁹

The Urban League of Nebraska and other community groups will be watching closely to see which population standard the Omaha Public School System adopts as a hiring goal for minorities and how the affirmative action plan is implemented in the coming decade.

By far the largest minority group in Omaha, Blacks, as of Fall 1979, numbered 11,492 or 24.8% of the District's 46,389 students.³⁰

Since the Fall of 1978, there has been a drop in Black enrollment of 470 students while White enrollment decreased by almost 3,000.³¹

However, despite the loss in Black enrollment over the last year, the percentage or proportion of Black to White students has increased slightly.

If this trend continues, Black students could make up 35% of total OPS enrollment within the next five years (according to OPS Research) up from approximately 21% in 1970.³²

The magnitude of the issue of increasing minority and Black representation in the overall Omaha School District student population can be illustrated by the following data:

- 56.7% of the State's minority students are to be found in the Omaha Public School System.
- 81% of Nebraska's Black students attend Omaha Public Schools.
- 88.2% of all minority students in Douglas and Sarpy Counties are enrolled in OPS.³³

With so many of the State's Blacks and other minorities attending Omaha Public Schools, strong efforts should be made to insure fair representation of the interests of all students within the system.

Yet, since the last STATE OF BLACK OMAHA was released in early 1978, there have been doubts expressed by many within the Black community that the relative status of Black to White students was not improving.

One source of this doubt was the last Elementary and Secondary Schools Civil Rights Survey forwarded by OPS to HEW in early December 1978.

Data from that report revealed the following: In 1978, the overall suspension rate was 13.7% for Blacks and 5% for Whites or a ratio of 2.7 to 1. At the junior and senior high school level, the rate was about 2.5 to 1. However, at the elementary school level, the figure is 5 to 1 Black to White suspensions.

As distressing as these suspension figures were and continue to be, the Urban League of Nebraska wonders why the OPS School Board approved a budget cut in 1978 of \$50,000 for Positive Peer Culture and Human-Community Relations, yet granted a budget increase of \$50,000 to the Gifted and Talented Program, where, as of 1978, 94% of the total students participating were White compared to 6% Black. Broken down further, 2,643 or 12.9% of the 20,433 White elementary students were invited to join the program, while, 164 or 2.4% of the 6,564 Black elementary students were involved in this program.³⁴

The latest figures from OPS regarding the number and percentage of students mandatorily bused indicates that Blacks, making up 24.8% of

the overall student population, represent 36.7% of those transported.³⁵

The Urban League of Nebraska would like to know what has been accomplished or plans to be done to rectify the imbalances cited above.

HEALTH

The Urban League of Nebraska would also like to know whether there are any plans on the horizon that might help alleviate the critical shortage of health care manpower that has existed on Omaha's Near Northside for a number of years.

In May of 1978, the Urban League of Nebraska documented this need with the publication of "THE STATE OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN NORTH OMAHA". Included in that report was a detailed inventory of health professional manpower and services available to residents of Omaha's Near Northside.

Among the findings of that report, basically unchanged as of early 1980, were:

For a population of 45,454, only three full-time and one part-time physician was practicing -- an average of one doctor for every 13,000 people compared to the national average of one doctor for every 766 people. (p. 5)

There are only 8.5 dentists in the North Omaha target area or one dentist for every 5,300 people -- compared to one dentist to every 1,820 people nationally. (p. 5)

Pharmacists are in short supply on the Near Northside with only one for every 3,600 people compared to 1 to 1,820 people nationally. (p. 5)

Based on these national averages, Omaha's Near Northside should

have 59 physicians (rather than 3.5), 27 dentists (instead of 8.5), and 27 pharmacists (versus the 12.5 currently there).

In addition, there are currently no acute hospital beds available within the target population area of the Near Northside, however, there are a number of other acute care facilities located in the nearby fringe areas to the south, west and north of the inner city.

Transportation to and from these facilities is likely to be quite difficult for many North Omaha residents, especially the 45%, who, according to the 1970 Census, did not own automobiles. (For the record, an Urban League of Nebraska Community Needs Assessment Survey conducted in 1979 confirmed the above figure to be accurate)

In addition, there is the nagging question of the affordability of private health care insurance for people who have a median income only 43% of the Omaha SMSA average of just over \$16,000, as well as an unemployment rate at least 3 times greater than that for Omaha citizens in general.

Needless to say, much needs to be done to bring health manpower standards up to par with the rest of the Omaha SMSA -- which is not suffering from a shortage of physicians.

In fact, a recent study conducted by the Omaha Tomorrow Health and Social Services Task Force indicated that, the number of active physicians in Douglas and Sarpy Counties increased from 932 in 1972 to 1,231 in 1976³⁶ -- or about one doctor for every 325 people, compared to one doctor for every 13,000 in the North Omaha target area.

In spite of this demonstrated deficiency of health professional manpower availability on Omaha's Near Northside, increased numbers of

doctors, dentists and pharmacists alone may not be the ultimate solution to the health problems of the residents of the inner city.

Better distribution of the current surplus of practicing physicians within the Omaha SMSA might be a way to improve health services for residents of underserved areas.

In any case, there are few definite answers since little is known about the actual health care needs of the Black and other disadvantaged residents of the Near Northside.

What is known is that the White infant mortality rate in Omaha-Douglas County declined from 16.01 to 13.1, but increased from 16.9 to 22.3 for Blacks and other minorities under one year of age.³⁷

Health Department figures show that in 1978, non-Whites, composing 12% of the Omaha-Douglas County population, accounted for 32.1% of live births with birth weights of less than 5.5 pounds.

Hopefully, research efforts will be increased and plans of action developed to increase the chances for the survival and development of future generations of Omaha's minority citizens.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Those chances for the survival and development of future generations of Omaha's Black citizens may very well depend on the level of representation, either direct or indirect, enjoyed by the current Black population in the existing political system.

Regarding direct representation, no Black, as of January 1980, sits on the Omaha City Council, or the County Board. In fact, the

only Blacks in elected public offices in Omaha are two members of the ten member Omaha School Board and two members of the Metro Tech Community College Board.

In the last few years, there has been some evidence that some members of the City Council, though elected on at-large bases, do attempt to indirectly represent the interests of Omaha's Blacks and other minorities.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In the November 1978 general election, both major candidates for Omaha's 2nd Congressional District seat made serious attempts to court the Black Omaha vote.

The margin of victory in that particular race was just under 7,000 votes. Voter turnout in the heavily Black populated Near Northside was 6,572.³⁸

The above figures represented 47.5% of the 13,844 registered voters in selected wards and precincts with high density Black populations.

However, despite the highest voter turnout by the Near Northside since 1974, aspiring candidates for future 2nd District and other elections should keep in mind that the 1977 Urban League voting study indicated that there are approximately 22,000 eligible Black voters in Census Tracts 6, 7, 9-13.09, 15, 51-54, 59.01 and 59.02.³⁹

Using this 22,000 figure as a rough index, Fall 1978 election results would indicate that only 62% of all those residents living on

Omaha's Near Northside registered, while a mere 30% actually voted.

Even so, those 30% were enough to make a difference in the last general election. Hopefully, that 30% will be increased to 50% or higher by the time the next STATE OF BLACK OMAHA is released.

In conclusion, Black political participation must continue to grow in the future, not only to increase the number of elected Black officials, but also to improve the bargaining power of Blacks as a whole in shaping public policies and influencing the outcome of local elections --- whether they are held on a district or at-large basis.

CONCLUSION

In sum, we have documented the standards of living for Blacks compared to Whites, for the minority community in relation to the majority, and, finally, the state of Omaha's Near Northside vs. the general community.

In each case, we have found the former to be worse off than the latter, both in absolute and relative terms.

In addition, we attempted to highlight the analysis of social, economic, and political conditions for Blacks in Omaha by setting forth the major issues of 1979, that, in our opinion, reflected the underlying attitudes of the majority community toward Blacks and other economic minorities in Omaha.

In this final section of THE STATE OF BLACK OMAHA, the Urban League of Nebraska will attempt to assess the impact of issues that have taken root in Omaha in 1979 but which may have a great effect upon

the chances for the Black community to begin to catch up with the rest of the community in receiving their fair share of the "Good Life" in Omaha, Nebraska.

COMMENTARY

"Omaha at the Crossroads: Impact 1980"

An Urban League Perspective

As we mentioned in the first section of this report, the major issues of 1979 in Omaha were: the Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Ordinances, the scattered-site housing controversy, the school spending lid, and the potential election of Omaha City Councilmen by district.

In 1980, the impact of the affirmative action ordinances on Black employment and minority business will depend largely on how aggressively minorities are recruited by various City Departments.

Whether or not the approval of low and moderate income housing will have an impact on restrictive residential housing practices will hinge on how quickly units are constructed and occupied.

Finally, how much impact the school spending lid will have on inner-city education or whether district elections are held will depend on the success of two bills currently under consideration by the Unicameral.

In 1979, as we stated earlier, all the above programs and debates were affected by the question of whether there was any room for minority rights within the confines of majority rule.

As of early 1980, that question is still largely unanswered. The Urban League of Nebraska feels that conditions for Blacks and other minorities in Omaha could worsen if zero budgets and rule by

petition become the law of the land. However, if common sense prevails and spending is allowed to increase at a reasonable rate and local government is allowed to function, then at least the possibility for responsible social change exists.

In 1980, the Urban League of Nebraska hopes that attempts are not made to saddle both state and city government with zero percent spending lids. Such actions could undercut chances for community development in all sectors of the economy and would affect everyone, not only the minority community.

We also hope that rule by referendum does not spread to the housing arena. Local citizen groups have already forced City Council to consider a resolution which, if passed, would require neighborhood approval before a subsidized housing unit could be built.

Finally, the Nebraska Unicameral in May of 1979, mandated that Omaha City Councilmen be elected by district beginning in 1981. However, a bill to be debated by the Unicameral in 1980 (LB 746) proposes to allow Omaha voters to choose how they elect City Councilmen. In the past, Omaha voters have overwhelmingly voted down elections by district, the approval of which would give greater representation to the residents of both North and South Omaha. With the fate of LB 746 still in doubt, minority interests are in jeopardy of being compromised at the expense of majority rule.

Another very serious question that must be answered if Omaha is to move forward as a united community is:

Will Omaha in the 1980's be able to reverse the virtually unchecked migration of its more affluent citizens from the central city to the southwest suburbs?

In some corners of the academic community, it is felt that the process of out-migration from the suburbs into the city has already slowly begun to occur.

One argument suggests that as double-digit inflation worsens and housing values continue to escalate, many families will come back to the city out of financial necessity. However, fear and ignorance sometimes override purely economic considerations, especially when the futures of one's children are perceived to be at stake.

Continuing this line of thought: while those adults whose children have been reared might consider moving back into the city to buy a smaller, less-expensive house, those with young children or those about to become parents would probably be willing to make a heavy financial sacrifice in order to possibly guarantee their offspring a better chance to succeed.

As of early 1980, in what direction does the evidence point in relation to these two arguments?

According to a recent study by UNO's College of Applied Urban Research, while there may be evidence that more households are moving into Omaha than are moving out, the City of Omaha proper is still experiencing net population losses in relation to Douglas and to nearby Washington County.

Part of this population decrease could be attributed to "White Flight" from the Omaha School District which has been taking place at a rapid rate since 1970. In fact, White enrollment figures have been declining even more rapidly in the Westside School System than in OPS.⁴⁰

The end result of this exodus of Omaha residents with school-age children will be an unbalanced situation in which the less affluent portion of the general population, (Black or White) is forced to remain in the inner city while the more affluent have a choice of whether to leave or stay.

The Urban League of Nebraska acknowledges the concerns of those who have already left the Omaha School District or are contemplating doing so.

We primarily sympathize, however, with the fears of the many parents residing on the Near Northside, who cannot afford or do not want to leave the city. In this light, we wonder how their children's educations are going to suffer if the Omaha School District loses not only its tax base, but also its teachers and staff, due to either financial considerations, or to moral problems or to both.

In our opinion, the chances of those public school-aged children residing in the Omaha School District to obtain a decent education in the 1980's, may very well depend on whether changes are made by the Unicameral regarding spending lid legislation.

In Omaha, the impact of the current school spending lid is just beginning to be felt. If allowed to continue in its present form, the Omaha School District could find itself doing business in the future on a "pay-as-you-go" basis, an action that could limit even more the chances of minority and economically disadvantaged children to obtain a quality education.

One way to prevent some of these problems from occurring might be to merge the Omaha School District, District 66, Ralston and the Millard School Districts into one giant system.

Opponents have argued in the past that one consolidated school system would only make the Omaha School District be responsible for administering more taxpayer funds, --- a prospect to some that is completely unacceptable, under any circumstance, even if it means watching not only a school system, but also an entire city begin to deteriorate, a situation that has already occurred in many major cities in the East and Midwest.

It is possible, however, for Omaha to continue to grow and prosper in the 1980's.

For that to begin to occur, citizens of Omaha need to start thinking in terms of dealing with common urban problems rather than continuing to dwell on the notion that less fortunate areas of the city need only "pull themselves up by the bootstraps" in order to grow and develop like the more affluent areas of the Greater Omaha Metropolitan Area.

To raise yourself up in true pioneer spirit requires, in our opinion, not only pulling up one's bootstraps, but having a boot to wear in the first place.

POSTSCRIPT

At this time, the Urban League of Nebraska would like to make as clear as possible the perspective from which we see the need to push for responsible social change regarding minority interests as well as the need for a united community effort to solve complex urban problems.

In this light, we would like to share with you some thoughts of a man dedicated to acting as he believed for what he believed to be right:

"Our goal must be to move beyond racism and create an Open Society...An Open Society is not merely an 'integrated society', but, 'rather, one that offers choices and options'..."An Open Society has to be based on equality".

"This means neither the superficial 'equality of opportunity' that gets so much lip service these days, nor does it mean an impossible equality of achievement that assumes everyone will do as well as everyone else, regardless of innate differences."

"The measure of equality has to be group achievement: when in each group in our society, roughly the same proportion of people succeed and fail, then we will have true equality".

"Building an Open Society will require hard, determined work by all people, white and black...I believe deeply that whites and blacks will have to learn to work together. Understandably, there will be frictions, but if we are to survive, we must both strive to attain our common goals".

Whitney M. Young, Jr.
1921-1971

Finally, the Urban League of Nebraska would like to present a series of recommendations that we feel ought to be considered for implementation in light of the late Whitney Young's remarks, as well as to begin to deal with the widening gap between Black and White standards of living. We are insisting that these changes be viewed as the beginning of a blueprint for action; between equals, between Black and White citizens, between the majority and minority communities, and between the Near Northside and Omaha as a whole. We feel that we have waited long enough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. A real commitment on the part of local government to implement a plan for the overall economic redevelopment of the Near Northside on a community-wide scale rather than a piece-meal basis.
2. An equally strong commitment on the part of the City of Omaha to allocate and spend Community Development Block Grant Funds more in proportion to need in the most blighted areas rather than continuing to earmark 40% of subsidized funds for the downtown mall.
3. The enactment of a strict "Open Housing" Law in order to strongly discourage the practices of "redlining", racial steering, especially as they apply to the residents of the Near Northside.
4. A joint program on the part of the local financial lending institutions to make home improvement loans more readily available to Near Northside residents (N.B. An informal survey of 15 local banks indicated that for 1977, a total of 156 Improvement loans and 78 mortgage loans were approved for homeowners in North Omaha, with a population of almost 45,000).

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (con't)

5. Continuing efforts to increase the enforcement of City Codes, especially in the area of absentee landlords keeping their properties up, by expanding permanent staff in this area and by maintaining and expanding the 1980 program involving CETA Summer Youths as informal inspectors.
6. Positive action by the City to clear the thousands of vacant lots on the Near Northside and make them suitable for business development per the passage of Amendment I in November 1978 elections.

EMPLOYMENT

1. A firm commitment by the City of Omaha to set the example for full and equal employment for racial minorities by increasing hiring at least to population parity levels (12%) in administrative, professional, technical and protective service job categories.
2. An even greater commitment by private industry to increase their minority hiring, especially in the higher skilled, higher paying jobs, to a level of population parity. As with the City, this means establishing numerical goals for the hiring of minorities and implementing an Affirmative Action plan to achieve those goals within a specific time period.

EDUCATION (con't)

4. We recommend that the OPS Board should resolve to have a Black representative on the staff of the Gifted and Talented Program. In addition, testing methods and the nomination process for potential candidates should be reviewed and revised in order to improve the extremely low (6%) participation rate for Black students.
5. The OPS Board should commit itself to improving programs designed to help those students that need remedial work.
6. The OPS Board should make a total commitment to increase the hiring rate of Black teachers from the current level of 9.5% to 25% in order that Black teaching levels will be consistent with the percentage of the Black student population.
7. That community action groups and social service agencies in North Omaha make a commitment to establish a permanent committee to serve as a liason between the school district and the minority community. This committee would closely monitor the progress of the OPS Board in following through these recommendations as well as others made by responsible citizen groups. In addition, committee members would actively seek to keep the residents of the minority community informed as to the progress of the OPS Board in improving the quality of education for all its students.

EDUCATION (con't)

8. That the minority community work with the OPS Board to minimize the effects of the school spending lid upon Black and other disadvantaged students, within the Omaha school district. In this regard, efforts should be made to amend current lid legislation to provide for easier removal of such budget limiting mechanisms if desired.

HEALTH

1. The implementation by the City, in conjunction with the private sector, of an overall redevelopment plan for the Near Northside in order that the area be made more attractive for private physicians, dentists, pharmacists and other health professionals to locate their practices in the Special Impact Area (16th to 30th; Cuming to Ames).
2. The implementation of a plan to recruit General and Family Practice M.D.'s from the National Health Service Corps for the North Omaha target area per the Health Council of the Midlands' finding that Northeast Omaha is suffering a severe health manpower shortage. In addition, attempts should be made to recruit physicians' assistants to increase the number of patients that can be seen by M.D.'s currently practicing in the Northeast Omaha area.

HEALTH (con't)

3. The City-County Health Board should commit itself to pass a resolution indicating their full support of the Public Health Clinics operated by the Douglas County Department of Health.
4. The establishment of a Primary Care Physicians Clinic in the center of the Special Impact Area of Northeast Omaha in order that local residents have some access to private physicians other than those living in West Omaha.
5. Full community support of the Community Plaza Health Center as the focal point for community-based efforts to see patients not only on an emergency basis, but also in terms of preventive treatment. In addition, the resources of the Community Plaza ought to be utilized to provide outreach services to those residents unable to come to the clinic.
6. The implementation of community programs stressing the need for preventive check-ups, especially in the area of pre/post natal care and where these services are available and affordable, etc. Ideally, all community-based action programs and social service agencies operating in Northeast Omaha should be involved in this process.
7. A permanent Task Force should be established to review and monitor the planning, development and implementation of all the

HEALTH (con't)

7. above-mentioned recommendations individually and as they relate to the overall economic revitalization of the North Omaha target area. Members of this task force should be drawn from community action groups and social service agencies operating within Northeast Omaha as well as from the Health Planning Council of the Midlands and the Douglas County Department of Health.

8. A committee should be established to act as a liason between the North Omaha community and our elected public officials, both locally and nationally, in order that these legislators can be more informed of the progress and be better advocates for minorities in the area of health care programs for Northeast Omaha.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

1. A united effort on the part of the Urban League of Nebraska, the NAACP and other community-based groups to increase Near Northside voter turnout to at least 10,000 persons by the 1980 elections.

2. An ongoing registration drive on the Near Northside to get all those eligible onto the election rolls.

3. As the 1980 election nears, a massive "Get Out The Vote" campaign in North Omaha should be conducted by the Urban

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (con't)

3. League of Nebraska, NAACP and others to mobilize Black voters for action.
4. In conjunction with the voter registration and get out the vote campaigns, voter education seminars be conducted in neighborhood community centers to emphasize the need for a strong Black vote.
5. In the event that district elections of Councilmen in 1981 are not upheld by the Unicameral, public meetings should be held to inform local residents as to the implications of the particular plan in force at that time.
6. A commitment by the citizens of North Omaha to help the majority community acknowledge that recognition by becoming politically involved to the extent that minority needs cannot be ignored in future elections.

F O O T N O T E S

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3. "'Togetherness' Omaha Black Pattern", Omaha World Herald, December 25, 1977.
4. "Figures Show City Losing Population", World-Herald, August 6, 1978.
5. "Togetherness.....", op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Regionfacts, MAPA, Vol. 3, no. 2, Summer 1978, p.1.
8. Ibid.
9. THE STATE OF BLACK OMAHA 1978, p. 16.
10. Regionfacts, op. cit.
11. Rebuild or Die: Which Shall it Be Omaha?, Northern Natural Gas Co., p. 3.
12. Ibid. N.B. While these figures refer to the general area of the city east of 42nd St., about 75% of the census tracts in which deterioration is worst are located in northeast Omaha.
13. Figures arrived at by extrapolating specific census tract data from 1978 ICES Report of the Omaha City Planning Department.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Rebuild or Die....., op. cit.
17. Figures extrapolated from 1978 ICES data.

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Affirmative Action Data: Omaha SMSA, 1979 Update, Division of Employment, Nebraska Department of Labor, Table 2, pg. 4.
21. Table derived by extracting unemployment figures from official affirmative action data reports prepared by the Nebraska Dept. of Labor from 1975-79.
22. THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA 1979, National Urban League, p. 26.
23. This figure was derived from information taken from a random sample of 300 client applications out of approximately 1200 client files as part of a Client Analysis by the Urban League's Employment Department in October 1978.
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28. "Minority-White Ratio Shifting", World Herald, Nov. 11, 1979.
29. SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OMAHA, Teaching Staff Profile, Oct. 1979, Affirmative Action data, Table II-A.
30. Omaha Public School Research Department, 1979 Fall Enrollment Report.
31. Figures were extrapolated from OPS Research Department Report: "Number and Percentage of Black Student Enrollment by School: Fall 1978-Fall 1979".
32. "Minority-White Ratio Shifting", op. cit.
33. Figures provided to the Urban League on an informal basis by the Research Co-ordinator of the Omaha Public Schools on December 1, 1978.

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34. Figures derived from 1978 Elementary and Secondary Civil Rights Survey submitted by the Omaha Public School System to the federal government on Dec. 1, 1978.
35. Affirmative Action Data, Omaha Public School System, Table VI-A-B.
36. Omaha Tomorrow, Ch. 8, Health and Social Services, p. 74.
37. Douglas County Dept. of Health, 1979.
38. Figures derived from official 1979 Omaha election commission data comparing registered voters to votes cast by party, ward, and precinct. Precincts and wards with the highest densities of black residents were selected. Included were precincts in Wards 1,2,3, 10,11, and 12. The 6,572 was the total number of residents in these precincts who voted, figure.
39. Voting Patterns of Black Residents of the Omaha Urban League of Nebraska Target Area, Urban League of Nebraska, Oct. 28, 1977, p. 3 and Table I, p. 4.
40. "Part I: Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Trend Perspectives: Omaha, Metropolitan area and State", Research Report #289, Omaha Public Schools, Table II, p. 3.